

# The President's Daily Brief

March 20, 1976

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

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## LEBANON

*Fighting increased throughout Lebanon this week as it became apparent that it could take some time to negotiate the replacement of President Franjiyah.*

The most serious clashes have occurred just east of the presidential palace at Babda. Pro-Franjiyah forces holding the Christian village of Al Kahhalah have for two days exchanged fire with followers of Socialist Kamal Jumblatt, who hold the Druze village of Alayh.

The US embassy reports that continued fighting in this area could lead to a flight of Christians to the secure Christian enclave to the north. This would mean the extension of de facto partition to an important rural area of mixed population so far exempt from serious fighting.

Jumblatt is primarily responsible for the continued clashes near the presidential palace. He is the only significant politician not yet reconciled to the latest Syrian peace initiative, and appears determined to force all parties to accept a weak Maronite successor to Franjiyah.

Brigadier Ahdab's political and military influence has been reduced almost to zero in the week since he announced his coup. The US defense attaché in Beirut reports, in fact, that Ahdab has virtually no forces under his direct command.

Both Jumblatt and Fatah leader Yasir Arafat remain sympathetic to Ahdab's cause, however, if not to Ahdab. The three share a desire to minimize Syria's influence in Lebanon.

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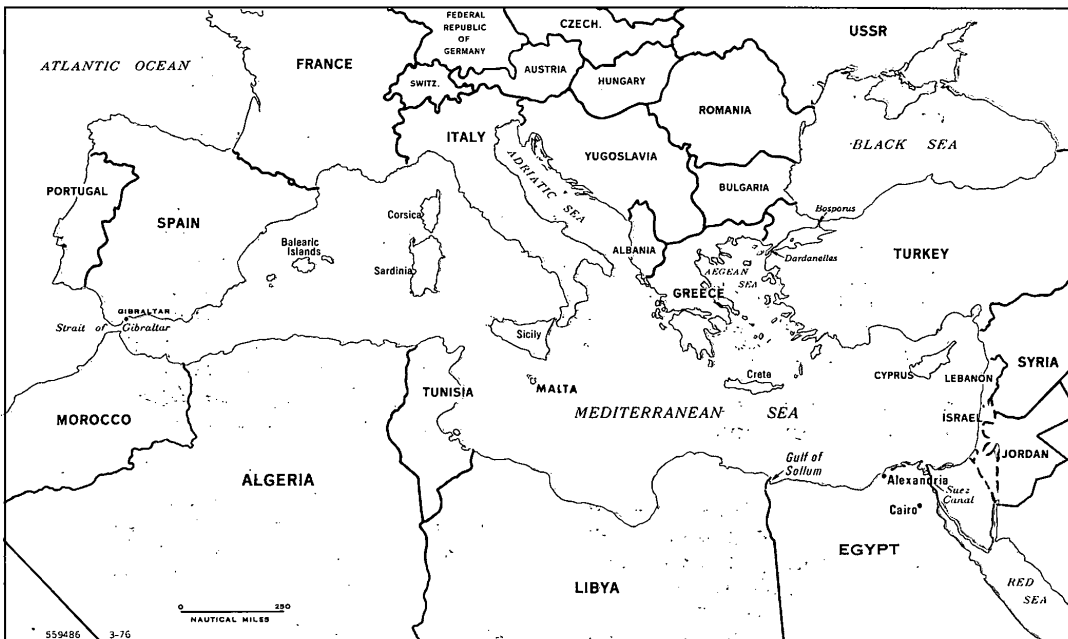
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USSR-EGYPT

*Egypt notified the USSR on March 17 that the Soviet navy must withdraw from the port of Alexandria within a month. A high-level Egyptian official informed the US ambassador of Cairo's action. Soviet naval units in Alexandria--about 12 in all--should have little trouble leaving the port within the time allowed.*

Moscow may have already begun preparations for evacuating the port. A Soviet naval transport and a cargo ship arrived in Alexandria yesterday. A Polnocny-class landing ship, now moving south through the Turkish straits, may be en route to Alexandria.

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Some Soviet tugs are in or near Egyptian waters. Several ships and submarines at Alexandria are either undergoing overhaul or have no propulsion systems and must be towed.

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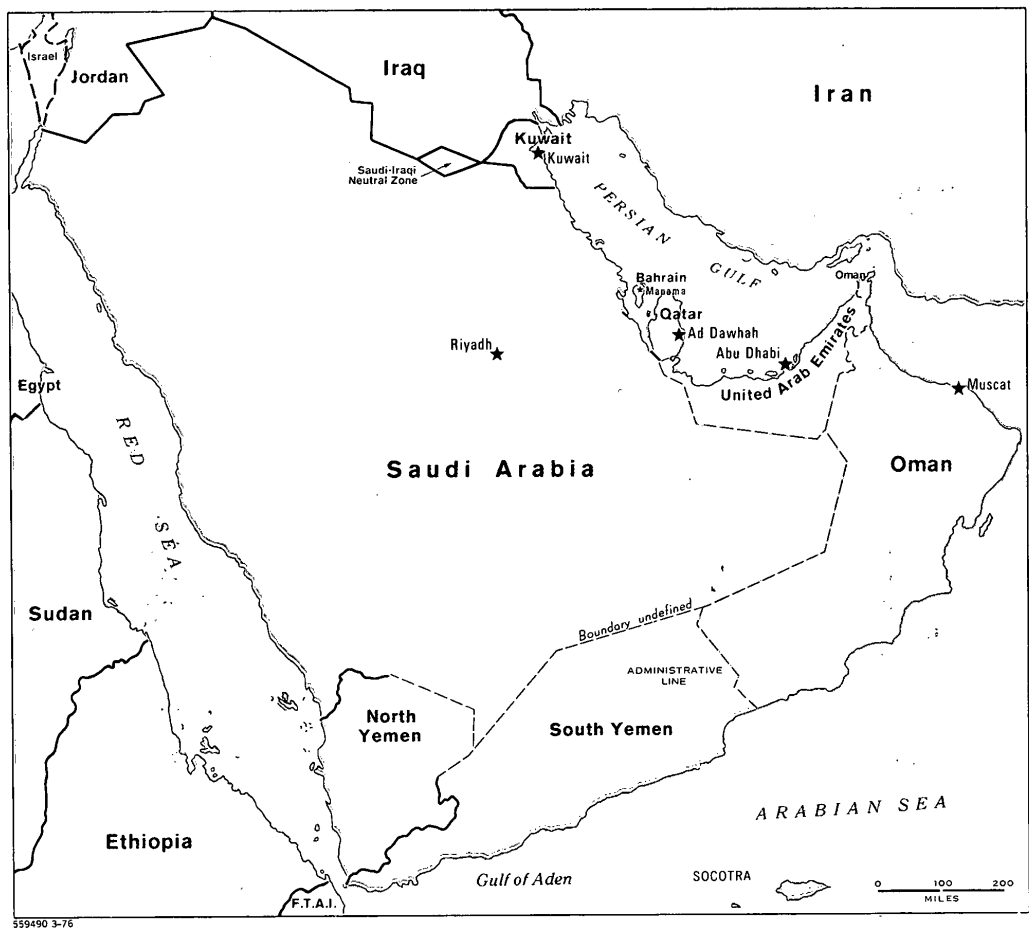
PORTUGAL

*Some 500,000 pro-Communist civil construction workers are scheduled to begin a nationwide strike on Monday.*

In the recent wave of walkouts, workers have focused on demands for increased wages and improved work conditions and have largely avoided the type of political confrontation that brought the Portuguese government to a halt last fall. Nonetheless, some members of the Revolutionary Council see the strikes as a Communist plan to force the government to declare a state of siege and postpone the legislative elections scheduled for April 25.

The Communists have maintained a low profile in the last few months, and in at least one instance recently warned that an unpopular strike could be used by the government to justify repression. The walkout of the pro-Communist construction workers on Monday may indicate whether the Communists are indeed behind the strikes.

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## NOTES

*Saudi Arabia's King Khalid begins a ten-day tour of the small states of the Persian Gulf tomorrow.*

This is the first such trip by a Saudi ruler, and it underscores Riyadh's intention to give greater attention to developments in the area. Khalid's tour will include visits to Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman.

The Saudis' regional policy involves:

--Maintaining the best possible relations with Iran and Iraq while quietly opposing any effort by either to increase its influence with the Gulf Arabs.

--Persuading the small Gulf states to follow Saudi leadership in order to give Riyadh added weight in dealing with Iran and Iraq.

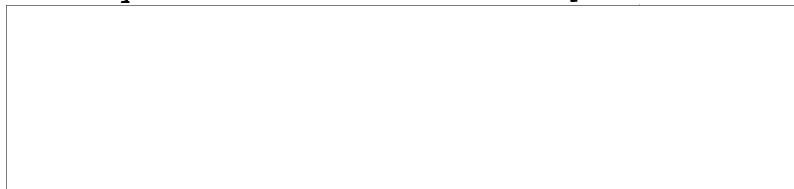
--Giving lip-service to the idea of regional security but postponing any formal agreement or any other move that might give Iran or Baghdad a pretext to intervene in the area.

--Endorsing the departure of all outside powers from the area.

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*President Giscard of France is facing increasing criticism in the wake of the leftist opposition's major gains in the recent local elections and the withdrawal of the franc from the joint European float.*

Giscard's decision on the franc is being cited by the leftist opposition parties and the French press as an indication of his general failure to deal decisively with the nation's economic problems.



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*The ministers named yesterday to Egypt's new cabinet are mostly holdovers from the one that resigned the day before.*

All key ministers retained their previous portfolios. The only significant change was the creation of a new post, deputy prime minister for production. This is in line with President Sadat's attempt to represent the appointment of a new cabinet as a major effort toward resolving economic difficulties. The reshuffle is unlikely, however, to result in much real improvement.

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